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PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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Comments on Montana's Proposed Medicaid Waiver for Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina

Dear Interested Party:

The purpose of this letter is to seek public comment on a proposed Medicaid waiver to aid in the provision of Healthcare Services for Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) has been coordinating activities with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), as thousands of Gulf Coast residents sought refuge from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Many states have quickly mobilized to care for the storm's victims. On September 16, 2005, CMS provided States a waiver application for Medicaid programs to ensure that Hurricane Katrina evacuees that come to Montana continue to have access to medical services. The waiver provides expedited eligibility and healthcare coverage for Medicaid-eligible people displaced by the disaster.

Under this 1115 demonstration, effective retroactively to August 24, 2005, evacuees who have been displaced from their home as a result of Hurricane Katrina will be provided the opportunity to enroll to receive services under the Medicaid program in Montana. Applicants provide self-declaration of information needed for an eligibility determination if the individual is unable to produce necessary verification. This demonstration allows for self-attestation for items such as displacement, income, residency, resources, and immigration status if the evacuee is unable to provide documentation.

The waiver establishes a separate eligibility category for evacuees from counties and parishes that have been declared national disaster areas due to Hurricane Katrina, and the costs of services provided through the waiver will be paid solely from federal funds. Evacuees remain in this category for up to five months. Following that period, those who stay in Montana will apply as Montana citizens and will fall under the usual eligibility guidelines.

Evacuees can apply for this coverage using a simplified application by contacting the local County Offices of Public Assistance. Evacuees can apply through January 31, 2006, for up to five months of coverage. Medicaid coverage will be provided for eligible storm evacuees who are:

- Children up to age 19 if the family's income is at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
- Parents of these children if the family's income is at or below 100 percent of the FPL.
- Pregnant women up to 185 percent of the FPL.
- Individuals with disabilities and low-income individuals in need of long-term care up to 300 percent of the Supplementary Security Income (SSI) level.

Evacuees will have access to the same benefits provided by the Montana fee-for-service Medicaid program. Providers will be able to file claims retroactively for services provided since August 24, 2005. To receive payment for services, providers will need to file claims through the Montana Medicaid system. The waiver program will continue through June 30, 2006.

DPHHS has already implemented this simplified eligibility application and coverage under the Medicaid program. CMS developed this section 1115 demonstration initiative to document the State efforts to ensure the continuity of health care services for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Montana intends to apply for this waiver and participate in this unique cooperative demonstration that allows coverage of evacuees from the affected geographic areas in which this Natural Disaster has been declared.

As we work to recover from one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States, our hearts, thoughts, and prayers go out to those suffering and those who are assisting in rescue efforts.

A copy of the waiver application can be obtained on the DPHHS website. The website is www.dphhs.mt.gov. Any questions related to this waiver initiative should be addressed to Jeff Buska, Senior Medicaid Policy Analyst (406) 444-4145. Written comments should be addressed to: DPHHS Attn: Jeff Buska, PO Box 4210, Helena, MT 59604.

Sincerely,



Joan Miles, Director
DPHHS

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